

TO: The New Jersey State Department of Education Members

FRO: Margaret R. Bush, RN, MSN, CNS, BC
President, New Jersey State School Nurses Association

DATE: May 17, 2006

RE: Testimony on Proposed Changes to N.J.A.C. 6A:16.2

Good afternoon. I am Margaret Bush, President of the New Jersey State School Nurses Association. I appreciate this opportunity to address the strong opposition of our association of over 1200 members to the deletion of the requirement for each district to employ a "full-time" certified school nurse from N.J.A.C. 6A:16.2.

The role of the certified school nurse is a full-time responsibility. However some people may view the role of the certified school nurse, I am here to tell you a nurse is not a nurse. School nursing is a specialized practice and requires competence in many areas of both health and education. Instead of changing the code to reduce the waivers that small districts and special education schools are applying for, the Department of Education should investigate why so many waivers are being requested by these schools.

Are these special school districts claiming financial hardship in hiring certified school nurses? These schools derive a portion of their revenues from public funds from sending schools or districts and therefore should be held to the same standard of care delivered as any New Jersey public school regardless of how small their student population may be. The Department of Education should not issue a waiver to schools who claim hiring a certified school nurse as a financial hardship. Do these same districts not hire highly qualified, highly certified superintendents, principals, guidance counselors and teachers?

Are these special school districts claiming that they cannot locate certified school nurses to hire them? According to the Department of Education's statistics for 2004-2005, there were 345 school nurse certificates issued to nurses in New Jersey. Surely with this large number of newly certified school nurses, locating and hiring one should not be difficult if the salary offered these specialized professionals reflects their educational preparation.

The State Board of Education states that the elimination of the full-time equivalent certified school nurse requirement will give school districts the "flexibility" to provide appropriate nursing services for the medical needs of its students as identified in the district's Nursing Services Plan. Unfortunately, many Nursing Services Plans are not meeting the needs of all students in every school building in New Jersey. Certified school nurses in many districts already cover more than one building in their school district "complex". So districts already have the flexibility that the Board thinks this proposed change will provide them. What

do you think will happen if you allow these districts to reduce, even further, the certified school nurses' access to students?

What about our students' safety? Students in every New Jersey school deserve to have the skilled services of a certified school nurse available to them every school day and every single minute of every school day. The certified school nurse's orientation is community based and his/her responsibility is to ALL students and staff in the building. The other medical care providers appointed by a district's Board of Education who are assigned to provide services to one student are not responsible for the school community but only for that one student. Even if a school has a student population of 20 with 10 students having one to one services, who will provide the specialized care for the other 10 special students? Who will be able to provide the Department of Education's mandated services and help assure the well-being of every human in the building? A part-time certified school nurse? That is what you are asking for if you remove the full-time requirement for a certified school nurse. Removal of the requirement for a full-time certified school nurse should not be viewed as a comprehensive solution to staffing problems. Would you want your child or grandchild to be in a school that does not have a full-time certified school nurse available in an emergency or if the child gets suddenly ill?

All students are special to certified school nurses. And healthy students learn.

New Jersey has always been a national leader in requiring that school nurses be certified and to have at least one school nurse per district. Do not dilute the ability of the certified school nurse to meet best practice standards by cutting the time they have with their students to provide the much needed medical care to help keep them healthy and in school, learning.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this most important issue.